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ABSTRACT

The purpose of North Carolina State University's Department of Agricultural Information is to reach people with information that will help them in their everyday lives. Major areas of concern are production and marketing, family living, 4-H and youth, community resource development, and natural resources. This report discusses the Department makeup currently and suggests those adjustments that will be necessary if the Department is to be successful in the next decade. Included in the introduction to this report are discussions of the Department's mission, role, and space and equipment needs. Under resident instruction the following topics are discussed: technical writing option, speech-communication curriculum, seminar, sociology and anthropology, two new scholarships, agricultural communications minor, service to the teaching faculty, and personnel needs. Research covers four areas: basic, applied, and graduate research, and personnel needs. Under Extension, the following are discussed: public mass media, publications and newsletters, communication hardware, reaching new audiences, internal communication, and training and personnel needs. (JS)

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SELF STUDY REPORT

Department of Agricultural Information

N. C. State University

October, 1971

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CONTENTS

Introduction..... 1

Mission of the Department..... 1
Role of the Department..... 2
Space and Equipment Needs..... 3

Resident Instruction..... 4

Technical Writing Option..... 4
Speech-Communication Curriculum..... 5
Seminar..... 5
Sociology and Anthropology..... 5
Two New Scholarships..... 6
Agricultural Communications Minor..... 6
Service to the Teaching Faculty..... 7
Personnel Needs..... 8

Research..... 9

Basic Research..... 9
Applied Research..... 9
Graduate Research..... 10
Personnel Needs..... 11

Extension..... 12

Public Mass Media..... 12
Publications and Newsletters..... 13
Communication Hardware..... 14
Reaching New Audiences..... 15
Internal Communication..... 16
Training Needs..... 16
Personnel Needs..... 17

INTRODUCTION

Mission of the Department

The primary aim of the Department of Agricultural Information is to reach people with information that will help them in their everyday lives. Production and marketing, family living, 4-H and youth, community resource development, and natural resources are major areas of concern.

Information, based on research conducted at N. C. State University and elsewhere, is transmitted through radio, television, and newspaper outlets and through publications, magazines, slides, and motion pictures.

The Department advises, trains, and assists other University workers in communication techniques. And it conducts research of its own to find out how best to provide information to people. Other responsibilities include college instruction in communications at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

The objectives will not change during the upcoming decade, but the task may become harder, due to changes taking place within the university, in the commercial media through which the Department operates, and in society itself. Much of the success of the program over the next decade will depend on the ability of the Department as a whole and the individual staff members to make these adjustments.

Role of the Department

The Department, as implied in the preceding statement, is essentially a service department, with the major share of attention going to extension or service-type activities. The major concern is with technique or methodology, whether in the area of extension, research, or teaching.

Technique is evaluated in terms of communication--the ability to transmit information (knowledge and ideas) from one individual (or group) to another. Thus, the foundation on which the activity of the Department is based comes from the disciplinary area of communication.

In practical application the Department is concerned with the entire spectrum of communications--from the most basic of theories to the most practical transmission of messages.

Communication is highly specialized. It is this specialization that has led to a separate department, rather than communication specialists scattered throughout the School. At the same time, a department located within the School has permitted the broad-scale development of the area--a development that would not be possible under a university-wide information operation where objectives are different.

Space and Equipment Needs

The Department is headquartered in Ricks Hall, with additional space in Tompkins Hall, Universal Equipment Building, and a building on the old poultry farm south of Western Boulevard.

Although office space in Ricks is becoming tight, it is anticipated that the planned addition to the building will continue to provide sufficient office space. It is assumed that it will continue to be necessary to go out of the building for supplementary storage space for publications and supplies. The most critical problem facing the department in the space and facilities area is the need for laboratory-type space in the headquarters area: the art and exhibit facilities now located in Tompkins Hall, a classroom, a combination library--conference room, several small and medium-size screening rooms for individual or small group viewing of films and other visuals, and additional visual aids studios.

The amount and kind of equipment available at the present is generally sufficient for an efficient and effective operation. However, with a sizeable inventory, it will be necessary to replace equipment items each year to maintain the inventory, and new equipment items must be added as technological improvements are made and as the department assumes new or different responsibilities.

RESIDENT INSTRUCTION

There have been six significant developments in the communications teaching area during the past five years:

(1) The development of a technical writing option in the English Department.

(2) The development of a bacculerate degree in the Speech-Communication area, in the Speech Division of the English Department.

(3) The development of a communications seminar in the Department of Adult and Community College Education.

(4) The development of a teaching program in communications in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

(5) The development of two scholarships in the communications area.

(6) The lack of progress in the "minor" in Agricultural Communications.

Technical Writing Option

A student electing the Technical Writing Option in the Department of English follows the established program for the B. S. degree in Liberal Arts, except that he is directed to take several specific courses in his English program beyond the sophomore level. Fifteen of the 24 hours required beyond the

sophomore level are taken up by five English courses--215, 231, 321, 322, 524. In addition there is a special 3-hour seminar for students majoring in the technical writing program.

Speech-Communication Curriculum

The core requirements for a speech-communication major are expository speaking, persuasive speaking, phonetics, oral reading, and a senior seminar. Electives may be taken from the areas of public address, oral interpretation, drama, and radio and television. The two courses in radio and the two in television are the first courses in the broadcast area ever offered on this campus.

Seminar

A three-hour seminar in communications has been developed for students in the Department of Adult and Community College Education. The seminar is directed by the head of the Department of Agricultural Information, who has a joint appointment between the two departments.

Sociology and Anthropology

An undergraduate course and two graduate courses have been developed in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. They are SOC 302, Mass Communications and Modern Society; SOC 533,

Theory of Human Communication Behavior; SOC 613, Theory of Mass Communication. The courses are taught by Dr. Theodore Hyman, formerly a member of this department.

Two New Scholarships

Two $500 annual scholarships are now available in the communications area, from the American Outdoor Writers Association and the N. C. Farm Writers and Broadcasters Association. Considerable flexibility is given to the scholarship recipients in developing their program of studies.

Agricultural Communications Minor

Few students have participated in the communications area of concentration outside the major offered to all students in the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Despite this disappointment, the 12-hour program will be continued, and members of the Department will work with students and potential students exhibiting an interest in this area. Recruitment efforts will continue. With the other courses and programs which have developed on the campus in recent years, it is possible that interest in this agricultural communications program might increase in the future.

The reception to the survey undergraduate course (AC 311) offered by the Department has been good. In addition to serving as a service course for agricultural majors, it is looked on

as a basic course in the technical writing and speech-communication curriculums. Also going well are the communication courses in the Agricultural Institute.

No major changes are planned in the Department's teaching program.

Service to the Teaching Faculty

The Department provides several services to the administration and teaching faculty, including editorial assistance in preparing catalogs and other items primarily of a recruitment nature; serving as the information outlet for activities of administration, faculty, and students; and providing resources to assist teachers in their classroom presentations.

It is anticipated that in the first two categories the service level provided will remain about at the present level. Editorial assistance will be provided in the printing area, relying on individuals outside the department to perceive the need, provide the budget, and initiate the publishing of the various materials. News stories will continue to be prepared in the Department and distributed primarily through the Office of Information Services.

Considerable change is underway in the teaching resources area. Working closely with the Teaching Improvement Committee, a new position of Educational Media Specialist has been developed

and is now being staffed. The individual will consult with individual faculty members to provide whatever assistance they may need. He will also manage the closed circuit television facility within the School, and serve as a liaison between faculty members and the production personnel in the Department.

Personnel Needs

Recent student unrest has focused on the problem of poor teaching in the university. James A. Perkins, speaking recently on the topic of reform in higher education, stated: "Both the curriculum and the style of teaching need reform. Less attention should be given to formal systems of courses and far more to how a subject is taught." Across the country there is considerable stirring in the area of teaching improvement.

One of the routes to improved teaching is the employment of teaching resource personnel who can assist the teacher in improving his classroom presentation. The educational media specialist currently being employed by the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences (similar people being employed in at least two other schools of the University) is only a start. This is a fertile field and if an effective program can be developed, several additional teaching resource people will be added to the staff during the upcoming decade.

RESEARCH

Basic Research

A program of basic research was started in the Department in 1967. Titled "The relationship of age to information processing capacity of adults," the project is concerned with the influence of age on the ability of human subjects over a 50-year age span to function as communication systems. In addition to funds provided by the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Agricultural Extension Service, funding has come from the University Faculty Research and Professional Development Fund and the U. S. Office of Education. Work in this area will continue over time, but no specific directions or projects are contemplated at this time.

Applied Research

The applied research thrust of the Department continues to be the evaluation of the methodology used by the Extension Service staff and an analysis of the service functions of the Department. Projects during the past year placed a monetary value on the radio time used by county Extension workers; postal delivery time for motion picture films to points throughout the state; and newspaper usage of the home economics news distributed by the

Department. No change in this phase of the Department's operation is anticipated during the coming years.

Graduate Research

A new dimension to the Department's research program has come through the graduate program of the Department of Adult and Community College Education. This department attracts students from a wide variety of professional careers, many with an acute interest in some aspect of communication. The head of the Department of Agricultural Information, with membership on the graduate faculty, serves as a member of a number of graduate student committees, and as an informal advisor for students whose research contains a communications component. Some examples during the past year include a minister interested in audio-visuals to improve performance of Sunday school teachers; an agricultural editor interested in sources of information used by disadvantaged rural families; a training director in a department store interested in evaluating training programs for new workers; a county agricultural agent measuring farmers' knowledge of liming practices; and a community college administrator evaluating public relations efforts of North Carolina community colleges. This area is proving to be an effective route to increased communications research, and will be continued and hopefully expanded.

Personnel Needs

The Agricultural Experiment Station supports the salaries of two photographers, one artist, and partial salaries of eight professional editors, for an equivalent of 3.3 EPA and 3.0 SPA employees. Most of the service needs of the research program are being covered, with the exception of more features providing in-depth reporting of the research program, particularly in the area generally known as science writing. Considerable effort should be expanded to establish a new position to meet this need.

EXTENSION

Public Mass Media

Extension uses the public mass media--television, radio, newspapers and magazines--for both an educational and public relations function. All Extension workers use at least some forms of mass communication.

Competition among the media is causing two over-all trends with which Extension must deal: the trend toward quality and the trend toward specialization. The amount of news and information that can be offered the public is constantly increasing, but the amount of time that the public has for receiving information stays constant. Therefore, communicators are continually trying to think of ways of getting their messages across with greater speed, ease and efficiency. One obvious way is through better prepared articles and broadcasts. Another way is by zeroing in on the special needs and interests of a particular audience. Thus, commercial television aims for one audience; educational television programs for another. Radio Station X wants teenage listeners; Station Y wants their parents. The large morning newspapers serve one function; the weeklies serve another. And nowhere has media specialization been more evident than in the magazine field.

These trends suggest that Extension must be willing to sacrifice information volume for information quality. Also, the articles and broadcasts must be prepared with the specialized needs and interests of the media in mind. In many cases it may be possible to get wider dissemination of the same information by adapting it to the specialized needs of the various media.

Another way of serving the media is by staying abreast of the broad interests and concerns of society and capitalizing on subjects of current interest.

Information specialists are middlemen. They serve as a nexus between Extension information sources on the one hand and the media on the other hand. This means that they must keep up with what the information sources--agents and specialists--have to offer and they must stay abreast of what the media can use.

Publications and Newsletters

The clientele for Extension publications in the next 10 years will consist of many divergent audiences--rural farm, rural non-farm, and urban--each of which will have to be treated in a different way. The main audiences we will be working with will be commercial farmers, homemakers, marginal and part-time farmers, lawn and home gardeners, disadvantaged people, and youth. The latter two are the audiences needing most attention now and in the future.

If certain conditions are met, newsletters can be an excellent medium for conveying detailed information to specific audiences during the next 10 years. Specifically, if Extension workers are to overcome the difficulty of getting people to read their newsletters, they must do a better job of selecting topics, writing, improving appearance, and selecting and maintaining mailing lists.

The success of any direct mail program at the county level will depend on how well the information is tailored to the needs of the people, how well it is distributed, and how well the program is coordinated with other mass media efforts. Constant feedback on the use of information is essential if the state staff is to meet adequately the needs of the county staff.

Communication Hardware

During the past decade there has been a great influx of new hardware that Extension specialists and agents could use. In the next 10 years this machinery will be refined and improved, and still more will appear on the market.

The Extension Service presently is far behind other public agencies in the field of audio-visual aids, innovative telephone equipment, and other hardware items that could effectively enhance our education effort. For example, there are portable sound

systems available that would make agents' field days more effective. There are numerous telephone techniques and innovations being used by Extension personnel in other states that are not being employed in North Carolina.

The audio-visual field is too diverse and developing far too rapidly for any single individual to keep up with it. Yet, this area is so important to effective Extension programs that within the state organization there should be available to all members of the organization an expert in each general area of the audio-visual field. The Department will assign individuals to specific hardware areas, who will keep abreast of the latest equipment in each area and serve as reference points for county personnel and state specialists. They will make periodic reports to all county chairmen about hardware in their areas. This amount of attention is necessary in the hardware area if the Extension Service is to utilize the latest audio-visual teaching techniques.

Reaching New Audiences

Special effort must be made during the upcoming decade to effectively reach several new audiences through mass media and group channels. These include: (1) the family living in suburbia; (2) the young family, whose breadwinners are in the under 30 age bracket; (3) special interest groups, such as low income, the pacesetters, and youth.

Special techniques will have to be devised to successfully reach these groups, differing drastically from each other and from Extension's traditional clientele. The problem of image must be overcome in some instances, where Extension is still regarded as a "rural" or "farm" organization.

Internal Communication

There are many facets to internal communication within an organization as large and as widespread as the N. C. Agricultural Extension Service. Every department or division within the organization has a responsibility for internal communication within it. However, the Department, because of the nature of its work, has a responsibility second only to the Extension administration in the area of internal communication. Effort will continually be made to install new techniques and to improve old ones.

Training Needs

This report has focused attention on changing needs of the public media, changed audiences for publications, the pressing need for more quality in newsletters, new audiences to be reached, and a flood of new hardware available to help do the job. During the decade of the 70's Extension will be faced with more changes

than in any previous decade in its 60-year history. The Department has the methodology training role for all members of the organization. Increased effort must be made in this area if the organization is to successfully meet the challenges ahead.

Personnel Needs

To meet the needs of the Department and the organization over the next 10 years, the following additional personnel are seen as needed at this time:

Training Specialist-Coordinator. A prerequisite for the most effective in-service and induction training program with all forms of educational media is the addition of a methodology training coordinator. He would be responsible for scheduling and coordinating the various training activities and designing and conducting basic training in communication.

Direct Mail Specialist. Direct mail; long an important technique in extension, is destined to grow. This is a specialized area, and for Extension to use this method most effectively will require the addition of a direct mail specialist to the staff.

Area Specialists. Every member of the organization has an important communications role. However, it must be admitted that many otherwise productive members of the organization are limited

in their communication skills. To fully reach the potential, particularly with the commercial mass media, it will be necessary to add two or three area communication specialists to the departmental program.

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